MEK

Work in Pathwe

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U Myaing is an IN fisherman and in normal times he is helped by his family in catching and preparing fish. Another source of revenue is also renting out oxen and the making of mats usually relied on only when there is little other work. He regards himself as "one who works INS on a large scale", and on further questioning it appears that he was a sort of foreman working with a group of IN fishermen. About 95 other workers in Pathwe made their living by fishing and fish processing, but there were also some cultivators. In addition there were 9 or 10 in the paddy husking business, 4 or 5 merchants and one gardener. With these few introductory remarks let us examine in some detail the nature of IN fishing.

U Myaing describes the IN fishery of which he was a part as follows:-

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"The IN is located upstream about two miles from Pathwe. The trap is remade every year and costs anywhere from Rs. 5000/- to Rs. 10,000/- to make. It takes twenty men about one month to make the trap. First we plant timber poles, after which we put up the YIN- strips of bamboo held together by coconut fibre rope, in such a manner as to present a large flat surface. When the YIN has been safely put up (across the entire width of the stream) the fish are carried down (by the current) through the SHAW (inclined plane of the sluice) and they are caught at the end. At the deep end the bamboo fence is about 16 taungs high and only a little of the poles remain above water. These poles have to propped up by other timber poles. Then the YIN are placed across these poles and tied in position. All the water has to flow along this small channel, and the force of the current washes up the fish (at the end of the SHAW). The poles are hammered down into the earth to a depth of one LAN (one yard) The water passes through the dam, but the fish cannot. The fish cannot swim upstream again because of the force of the water in the narrow sluice, which is only about eight taungs across. The length of the trap is approximately 100 feet whereas the width across the stream is 200 feet. When the floods are high at times the fish do get away. The water spills over and the fish do escape. We catch the remaining fish. When the water increases we have to extend the dam sideways a long way. But the height of the dam cannot be raised. In the dry season those fish which have gone over are left stranded outside the IN by the retreating waters. Some people fish below the dam with nets and fish hooks.

"When the rains come, that is the time they spawn. This time is called NGA-YIT-THI time. At this time the fish group together to go upstream. The better the rains, the better the catch. After these fish have passed, the MEK is closed. The fish spawn at the beginning of the rains after they have collect and passed upstream. At about the month of TAW-THA-LIN (last month of the rains season) the MEK is closed and the fish that come down with the force of the water are picked up. If many fish go upstream - fish that spawn, then we get a good catch. If only few spawning fish go up, we get a bad catch. Even

if there are many fish, if the water is bad they may die off - and do not come down to the KHE. When the water is good we get many fish. When the water is bad it is called YE-NAR-KHE (the water is hurt). When the water is bad they die off on their own and become putrid on this side; they do not come down. When the water is bad it stops the coming down of fish even more effectively than if a YIN barrier were put up (further upstream.) They do not come down to the mouth of the KHE. 226 221 132

"There are 80 to 100 fishermen working at the CHAUNG-GYI IN where I work. Thirty of these are from YWA-GYI-GAT and they are the only IN workers there, although there are 7 other INS in the neighbourhood. They work for 6 months out of the year. During the month of TAGU when the fish is sold, we start on the YIN and work through the months of KASON, NAYON, WAGAUNG, TAWTHALIN and in TAWTHALINwe place it in the IN. Water comes down and with it the fish, and we end upabout the month of PYATHO. In the hot season we catch the remaining fish and after the hot season the INS are again auctioned by the Government. 226

"Night and day the fish are coming down and they have to be gathered up in wicker baskets and poured into tubs. They are coming down all the time. We have no special work time; both night and day. That is why there have to be so many workers. We have watches. If this person watches this night, that person watches the next night and another person the next night. They have to stay till morning. The person who has watched up till morning is given a turn (to rest) and another person placed there for the next night. The fisherman works for a day and a night. Then shifts are changed. The man who works from the afternoon is given a rest in the morning. There are shifts of eight to nine men at a time. These nine men are changed after a day and a night. They rest for a day and a night. 226 461

"Some of the more common fish are:- Nga Thaing, Nga Gyin, Nga Gyaung, Nga Myit Chin, Nga Dan, Nga Myin Yin; small fish are plentiful, Nga Khyone, Nga Hpare Aung, Nga Bat, Nga Khu, Nga Gyi; you get a lot. During one shift, (one day and one night) 2000 fish may come down, 3000 fish may come, or there may be 500, or there may be only 100. You cannot say for sure. At the end of the SHAW the fish are scooped up with kerosene tins and poured into the boat with wicker baskets. After that they are taken home. We take both big and small fish. The big ones are caught by hand and kept alive in big tubs, and it is the small fish that are scooped up with kerosene tins. We take all the fish that are stranded at the sluice end. The tiny fish escape through the YIN. Some larger fish also escape if the YIN cracks are wide.

"The large fish are kept alive and sent to the Rangoon markets and to various towns. They usually stay alive this way. When the distance is great they are placed in ice and sent. The other fish are dried or made into fish paste or NGAPI. In making Ngapi, the heads are first cut off. The scales are removed by wrapping the fish in gunny-bags and stamping with the feet after the bag has been placed in a tub. After that they are washed and salt is put in. After mixing thoroughly with salt they are pressed into jars. Those who want to pound their fish into NGAPI DAING (pounded ngapi) leave their fish to become putrid and then pound them. Those who want to keep them raw (AHMYIN) do not. 226 438 263

Ma Aye Myaing describes the preparation of ngapi as follows:-

"The fish have to be chopped and placed in water; after the scales are removed, the fishes are chopped and placed in water for a night. In the morning the putrid fish are taken out, mixed with salt and laid out to dry. In the evening they are again mixed with salt and pounded. You pound the fish today, lay 251 263